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What would you do if you walked out to your patio and came face-to-fang with a live rattlesnake? It could happen here in Schertz, or any of the surrounding cities.

Texas has four native poisonous snakes, and all can be found within the city limits. Don't be alarmed. You will be fine if you learn to identify the poisonous from non-poisonous snakes, and learn to deal appropriately with each.

There is such a thing as a good snake, and it's not a dead snake! For example, the king snake, bull snake and indigo snake eat other snakes.

The four snakes you should be concerned about are the coral snake, copperhead, cottonmouth and rattlesnake. If you learn to identify them, you can protect yourself. In addition, you will be able to differentiate between them and the beneficial snakes, and know to leave the good snakes alone.

So, how do you identify in the dangerous snakes?

Let's start with the coral snake. It has a distinctive color pattern: red, yellow and black bands run completely around its body. It measures between 22 and 26 inches in length, although the Texas live record is 47 ½ inches long. The coral snake has small, fixed fangs in the roof of its mouth and its venom is a neurotoxin, which works on the nervous system. To identify this snake from others, remember that its red and yellow bands always touch each other, while a similar non-poisonous snake has red and black bands that touch. This old rhyme can help you remember:

Red and Yellow kill a fellow

Red and Black venom lack

The other three harmful snakes are pit vipers. All pit vipers have large, triangular heads, small necks and large bodies. Each has elliptical, cat-like pupils, as well as heat-sensitive pits on the sides of the head near the nostrils, which they use to track prey. Pit vipers have large, retractable fangs that fold against the roof of the mouth, and deliver venom that is a highly concentrated digestive juice.

Rattlesnakes are easily distinguished from other pit vipers because they all have rattles on the end of their tails. They are born with a pre-button and gain a new segment each time they shed their skin.

Snakes are cold-blooded. In the spring, they are often discovered on concrete patios because concrete retains heat from the sun, and they crawl onto concrete surfaces to get warm.

During the hot, dry summer months, after you've watered your grass, small rodents will enter your yard in search of moisture. Snakes are then likely to enter the yard to eat the rodents. That's how the food chain works.

If you should find yourself face-to-face (ankle to face, that is) with a rattlesnake, try to remember these simple instructions: A snake normally can strike one-half to two-thirds its body length. If you are within the strike range, **do not** move your lower extremities. A snake will strike at the sensed motion and heat source.

If you have a hat, drop it on the snake and walk away. No hat? Try dropping a shirt, coat or whatever similar item you have over the snake. If you are holding a stick or broom, use it to push the snake further away from you. As a **last resort**, very, very slowly back away from the snake.

It's best, too, that you never go outside barefooted, especially in long grass or wooded areas. Wear sturdy leather boots or shoes for protection.

Hopefully, you won't need to use this information, but if you do come across a snake, following the guidelines will help keep you safe. You can learn more about snakes at the Schertz Public Library, or on the Internet at www.texassnakes.net.